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Guidance and Position Statements

ACOEM Supports COVID-19 Vaccine Mandates for Health Care Workers

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The American College of Occupational and Environmental Medicine (ACOEM) recommends that COVID-19 vaccination be mandated for all health care workers (HCWs). Comprised of occupational and environmental medicine professionals responsible for ensuring the health, safety, and well-being of all workers, the College stands with the growing number of organizations urging that all workers in health care settings be vaccinated against COVID-19.

With the recent surge of SARS-CoV-2 infections in the United States (U.S.) due to the Delta variant, it is even more imperative that HCWs be vaccinated. Unvaccinated HCWs put themselves in danger of contracting the disease and pose a risk to potentially transmit the virus to patients (especially their vulnerable patients), colleagues, and families. In addition, COVID-19 is more disruptive to the workforce and hospital/health care operations than any disease encountered in the last century due to required quarantining and potential length of illness.

Currently, all COVID-19 vaccines authorized in the U.S. are effective against COVID-19, preventing serious outcomes of severe disease, hospitalization, and death. Data show that the authorized mRNA vaccines also provide protection against variants of concern, including the Delta strain that is now predominant in the U.S. Vaccine effectiveness against hospitalization and death is high for all current SARS-CoV-2 variants.¹ This effectiveness is further demonstrated by current data indicating that the overwhelming majority of serious COVID-19 cases are occurring among those who are not vaccinated.

However, the fact that HCW vaccination rates are not yet above 90% universally represents fears, misinformation, information mistrust, and some valid confusion about the optimum *post-infection* vaccination timing/dosage among this group. While ACOEM supports universal vaccination, it's also important to approach all of those concerns compassionately and not vilify unvaccinated HCWs who have given heroic service since the start of the pandemic. The College also recognizes that exemptions from this policy may apply to those HCWs with medical

contraindications to COVID-19 vaccines or with other medical or religious exemptions as specified by federal or state law.

Institutions with mandatory vaccine policies will benefit from the advice and counsel of occupational and environmental medicine physicians to ensure that policies and procedures protect HCWs' confidentiality, that exemption decisions are made fairly and consistently, and that the importance of a comprehensive vaccine program is emphasized. ACOEM also recommends that health care workers be provided time off to receive the vaccine, that sick time be allowed for those who develop side effects, and that employers ensure HCWs have access to confidential medical consultations to address individual concerns.

HCWs have been on the front line in the war against COVID-19. Not only will they be protecting themselves by receiving the vaccine, but they are in a unique position to serve as vaccine champions and positively influence vaccination decisions of peers, patients, friends, and family.

The American College of Occupational and Environmental Medicine (ACOEM) is an international society of 4,000 occupational and environmental physicians and other health care professionals. The College provides leadership to promote optimal health and safety of workers, workplaces, and environments.

Citations

¹Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). *Science Brief: COVID-19 Vaccines and Vaccination*. Available at: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/science/science-briefs/fully-vaccinated-people.html>. Accessed July 28, 2021.

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